

Message Text

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43

ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 IO-10 AID-05 DPW-01 /071 W

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R 061158Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2581

INFO AMCONSUL BIEN HOA

AMCONSUL CAN THO

AMCONSUL DANANG

AMCONSUL NHA TRANG

USDEL JEC PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 1472

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT VS

SUBJECT: POLITICAL PRISONERS -- A DISCUSSION WITH CATHOLIC
OPPOSITION LLEADER

1. FOLLOWING IS MEMCON OF JANUARY 23 WITH PROFESSOR NGUYEN VAN
CHAU, SECRETARY GENERAL, PAX ROMANA. PROFESSOR CHAU IS PROMINENT
CATHOLIC LAYMAN AND MEMBER OF MODERATE OPPOSITION.

BEGIN TEXT:

PROFESSOR CHAU SAID THAT ALTHOUGH HE IS AMONG THE OPPOSITION
TO THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT HE DOES NOT BELIEVE IN FALSIFYING THE
TRUTH TO ADVANCE THE OPPOSITION CAUSE. CHAU CHARGED THAT THIS
IS THE CASE WITH THE POLITICAL PRISONER ISSUE. HE SAID THAT HE
MAKES IT HIS BUSINESS TO INVESTIGATE EVERY INSTANCE OF ALLEGED
GOVERNMENT ARREST OR MISTREATMENT OF CIVILIANS AND HE FINDS IN
EVERY CASE THAT CHARGES ARE FABRICATED OR DISTORTED. FR. THANH
LANG, FOR EXAMPLE, SAID CHAU, HAS JUST CHARGED THE GOVERNMENT
WITH THE ARREST OF 1,000 STUDENTS, WHICH IS ABSURD. (COMMENT: THIS
IS FIRST EMBASSY HAS HEARD OF THGE CHARGE.) CHAU SAID THAT SAIGON
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AUXILIARY BISHOP HUYNH VAN NGHI'S RECENT STATEMENT OF CONCERN

FOR ALLEGED ARRESTED STUDENTS IS A PUBLIC CONTRADICTION OF ARCHBISHOP NGUYEN VAN BINH'S LETTER TO BISHOP GUMBLETON DENYING THAT THERE ARE POLITICAL PRISONERS IN VIETNAM. (CHAU IMPLIED THAT THIS WAS A REGRETTABLE BREACH OF PUBLIC SOLIDARITY, AND THE GENERAL CONTEXT INDICATED THAT HE WAS ALSO RELUCTANT TO BELIEVE NGHI IN THIS MATTER.)

CHAU SAID THAT HE HAS HIMSELF WRITTEN ARTICLES FOR AMERICAN PUBLICATIONS INCLUDING THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER ATTACKING FALSE POLITICAL PRISONER AND OTHER CHARGES. HE SAID HE ALSO VISITED FR. CHAN TIN ON THE POLITICAL PRISONER MATTER. CHAU SAID THAT HE HAD SENT A YOUNG MAN FROM HIS OFFICE TO SEE THE PRIEST IN ADVANCE. THE YOUNG MAN, SAID CHAU, ASKED CHAN TIN TO NAME AN EXAMPLE OF A POLITICAL PRISONER, WHEREUPON CHAN TIN POINTED TO A YOUNG MAN SITTING IN THE SAME ROOM WHO HAD TROUBLE WALKING. CHAU SAID, HOWEVER, THAT, WHEN HE HIMSELF VISITED CHAN TIN AND ASKED THE SAME QUESTION, CHAN TIN DID NOT DARE TO POINT OUT THE SAME PERSON TO HIM. CHAU WAS IMPLYING THAT THE FRAUD WAS SO BLATANT THAT CHAN TIN WOULD NOT TRY TO PERPETRATE IT ON A MAN OF HIS EXPERIENCE. MR. WRIGHT ASKED CHAU WHY CHAN TIN INSISTS ON PUSHING THIS ISSUE. CHAU REPLIED THAT CHAN TIN FEELS A SENSE OF GUILT OVER WHAT HAS HITHERTO BEEN THE CATHOLIC ROLE IN VIETNAM WHICH HE, AS A CATHOLIC, WANTS TO EXPIATE. END TEXT. LEHMANN

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